

Bike/Walk Midland: Riding a Bicycle at Night

Riding a bicycle at night requires lights, reflectors, and an added safety awareness. Michigan law requires a headlight and a rear reflector as minimum requirements, but cyclists can significantly improve nighttime safety and comfort.

Bicycles are sold with reflectors installed: front and rear reflectors, pedal reflectors, and wheel reflectors. Any driver who has seen such a bicycle crossing in front of their headlights knows that the movement of the pedals and wheels really enhances visibility.

However, reflectors depend on the angle of light from a car's headlights and as that angle changes, bicycle visibility drops significantly. Reflector visibility also depends on the contrast between reflected light and background light levels, and that visibility can be quite poor near dawn and dusk or as the cyclist passes near street or yard lights.

When a bicycle is coming straight at a car in the opposite lane, the front reflector is often inadequate for visibility and of course reflectors don't help the cyclist see road hazards. With the advent of LED lighting technology, there is a wide selection of low cost and powerful battery operated bicycle lights available.

Experienced bicycle commuters who spend many hours per year riding in the dark have developed many "tricks of the trade" for lighting that not only make the cyclist visible to drivers, but let the rider see the road ahead. Two flashing red rear lights, set at different heights, make sure that any approaching car can easily see the bicyclists. Likewise, two white LED headlights can be aimed high and low, one to illuminate the road surface and one to catch the eye of drivers. Helmet mounted lights allow the rider to aim the headlight directly at a road hazard or to catch the attention of drivers.

In addition to lights, nighttime cyclists should wear light colored clothing, preferably with reflectorized fabric. Many cycling jackets have reflectorized accents, and pant clips with reflector strips are another way to make the rider more visible.

Riding at night can be safe and pleasant when the bicyclist has proper lighting.

For more information: www.midland-mi.org/government/departments/planning/Planning/planninghome.htm